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Wenham Lake factions agree to agree

BEVERLY -- For the first time yesterday, the groups arguing over the safety of Wenham Lake agreed that the regional water supply must be cleaned up.

The parties decided all fly ash must be removed from the water and a system must be installed to ensure no more contamination from the nearby Vitale dump will make its way to the lake, which supplies drinking water to 80,000 residents in Beverly, Salem and some of Wenham.

New England Power Co., the former owner of the Salem power plant that dumped the fly ash at the Vitale site back in the 1950s and '60s, has agreed to pay for the cleanup. The cost is unknown.

"Everybody's on the same page," said Salem councilor-at-large Kevin Harvey, upon emerging from the 2-hour-plus meeting.

Though there are still many details to be worked out, those who attended agreed that simply getting everyone to admit to the fly ash problem is a step in the right direction.

"I thought it was very positive," said Richard Chalpin of the DEP, who organized the event. "People came into the meeting with some expectations about differences. But those differences never materialized."

Lisa Evans, a member of the Wenham Lake Watershed Association that has been pushing for the cleanup, agreed.

"This was a good meeting," she said. "Prior to today, we weren't sure New England Power would get the ash out of the lake. This is a

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The crash closed all southbound lanes of the highway for four hours while state police accident reconstructionists investigated. Southbound traffic was detoured at Route 133.

Lt. Maloney said the breakdown lane in the crash area remained closed this morning, but that the Department of Environmental Protection was going to return with a cleanup crew about 9 a.m. to work.

He said fuel oil had gotten into storm drains and a nearby swamp.

Sgt. Sieberg said no charges have been filed in the crash, but the investigation is continuing.

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very positive development."

About 20 people attended the private meeting at the Department of Environmental Protection's office in Wilmington, including officials from Salem, Beverly and Wenham. Local activists, environmental engineers, and representatives from New England Power also attended.

It was the first meeting of the so-called Wenham Lake Technical Advisory Committee, formed recently by DEP to bring all of the parties together.

While they agreed in theory to clean up the fly ash, they did not come up with a specific plan. Two consultants are working on the plan to determine exactly where the contamination is and how to clean it.

"We think it can be done this year," Evans said. "We think it's definitely achievable, technically and permit-wise. We think it's important not to let another year go by."

Chalpin is taking a more conservative approach.

He said some aspects of the cleanup, like building the system to keep the fly ash from migrating to the lake, could be done this year. But it might take longer to line up the permits to remove all the fly ash from the lake.

"We all would like to get it done this season," Chalpin said. "But we're going to have to go through as if we're dredging a harbor."

Still, he will push for the required permits so the work will be done as quickly as possible. He said a second meeting of the committee will be held in the coming weeks to map out the permitting process.

Most importantly, Chalpin said, the various parties will continue to work together to see that the Wenham Lake water supply is adequately protected.

"It appears all the interested parties now feel

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comfortable with each other," he said.
"Comfortable with the plan to do this, finally,
in an appropriate way."

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